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SUBJECT: SPLM Diaspora Conference in Juba

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¶1. Summary: Over 100 Sudanese Diaspora SPLM members participated in the First Sudan People's Liberation Movement Chapters' Conference. The purpose of the conference was to familiarize Sudanese Diaspora members with the reality in Southern Sudan, to mobilize resources and, if possible, to draw upon them to support reconstruction and development activities. The Opening Session of the Conference was attended by Senior SPLM/GOSS Leadership, who strongly encouraged the return of Diaspora to Southern Sudan. End Summary.

¶2. USAID and State provided support to facilitate the travel of members of the SPLM Diaspora to attend the First SPLM Chapters' Conference that took place in Juba from July 11-July 16, 2007. Participants from SPLM Chapters in Australia, Canada, the United States, Europe, the Middle East and other African countries arrived in Juba to join the conference. For many, this was the first opportunity to return to Southern Sudan in as much as twenty five years. Conference participants are actively engaged in their current home countries in supporting the cause and message of the SPLM and Southern Sudan to their membership.

¶3. Minister for Labor, Public Service and Human Resource Development, Awut Deng Acuil, who also serves as the SPLM External Relations Secretary, was the central organizer of the conference. She and other speakers emphasized during the opening sessions of the conference that the Diaspora must play a key role in the development of South Sudan. Speakers, among them Rebecca Garang de Mabior, now the Presidential Advisor for Gender and Human Rights; the Deputy Governor of Central Equatoria; newly named Deputy Commander in Chief of the SPLA, Major General Paulino Matip; Pagan Amum Okiech, Secretary-General of the SPLM and First Vice President Salva Kiir

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Mayardit, challenged Diaspora members to lend not only financial, cultural and advocacy support but also to consider returning to South Sudan so that the professional skills they gained in other countries could contribute towards development efforts in South Sudan and to the transformation of SPLM from a guerilla movement to a national peace-building political party.

¶4. USAID Southern Sudan Director Allan Reed also provided remarks in which he noted the positive experience of the recently completed USAID-funded Diaspora Skills Transfer Program (DSTP.) Through this program, 100 members of the Diaspora volunteered their skills in education and health. Nearly half of the DSTP volunteers have remained after their voluntary service to continue rebuilding Southern Sudan, demonstrating the commitment and the potential of the Diaspora to be involved in reconstruction. Reed also emphasized

the important of increasing the participation of (Diaspora) women as agents of change.

15. Plenary session speakers covered a range of topics. Key among them were Professor Peter Anyang' Nyong'o, who noted that recovery in post-conflict countries often focuses more on physical infrastructure than on developing institutions needed to sustain recovery. SPLM Secretary General Pagan Amum acknowledged the challenge faced by the SPLM, which is trying to help change Sudan from a failed state to one that embraces a multi-party political system. Amum warned the SPLM against becoming too comfortable and relaxed in the Government. Amum stressed the importance of the SPLM's vision, mission, and core values and noted the threat posed by corruption which could corrode the party's foundations. Representatives of the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front and the African National Congress shared relevant experiences from their movement's transitions from rebellion to legitimate political parties and governments. Both emphasized the important contribution of the Diaspora to those efforts.

16. Additional themes raised by participants included the need to explore ways to provide economic incentives for returning Diaspora, possibly through salary subsidies or business loans; 2) the need to accelerate women's participation in all levels of government and development in Southern Sudan, as 25 percent was "the least" but not the maximum ceiling for their engagement; and 3) the importance of addressing tribalism in party politics.

6. In follow-up discussions with the Conference facilitator and Diaspora participants, ConGen staff was told that the Diaspora members intend to set up a SPLM website to address the lack of accurate information on party activities. The party leadership will determine the website content which will be maintained by Diaspora members. Diaspora participants complained that they did not have sufficient opportunity to speak on the key issues of concern to them, as the program was weighted heavily towards GOSS/SPLM presentations. Overall, however, there was great excitement and satisfaction with the conference. Diaspora participants expect to hold follow up sessions in which their concerns will be addressed.

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